

England Centre for
Practice Development



HEIF Funding Report 2016-2017

**Evaluation report of the impact of the second year of the
Community Art Studio Group initiative to enhance the
mental health and wellbeing of residents in Canterbury**

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Practice Development**

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Summary:

This two year project has enabled a group of self-selecting local Canterbury residents side lined by mainstream mental health services, to work together in a safe creative community space to explore their mental health and identity through the medium of art. The data collection tools were selected by the head of the Canterbury Art Studio together with members of the public who had enrolled in the programme. The head of the Canterbury Art Studio has written a separate report each year of the specific findings of the participants. The role of the England Centre for Practice Development has been to provide an evaluation report that highlights the impact of the scheme.

The public exhibition of the work in 2016 titled *Taking the Line for a Walk*, was so powerful in terms of raising community awareness as well as the positive impact that it had on the participants, that the group continued to work through 2017 and a second group has commenced and is exhibiting this season. The pilot has gained the attention of the Live Well for Longer programme and the Shaw Trust who are exploring continued funding with the Canterbury Art Studio.

This report has been generated by Carolyn Jackson, Director of the England Centre for Practice Development hosted by Canterbury Christ Church University in the Faculty of Health and Wellbeing. The second year of the project has been supported by a Higher Education Innovation fund (HEIF) in order to promote continuity of the work reported in 2016 and to enable the Canterbury Art Studio to continue to support cohort 1 whilst recruiting a second cohort of new budding artists from the Canterbury area who have found it difficult to access mainstream mental health services.

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All of the local Canterbury residents who have participated in the initiative and exhibited their work at the Beaney House of Art and Knowledge in 2016 and 2017 for sharing their stories through artistic expression.

Manda Gifford, Programming & Engagement Manager Canterbury Museums & Galleries for supporting two years of exhibition space in the Front Room at the Beaney House of Art and Knowledge.

1. Introduction and Background

Mental Health and Wellbeing – the National context

In the UK, mental health is the largest single cause of disability and represents 23% of the national disease burden costing the UK economy £70–£100 billion per year (OECD, 2014). However statistics demonstrate that only 25% of people with mental health issues are receiving treatment (Mind, 2017). Mental health can have a profound impact on the lives of tens of millions of people in the UK, and can affect their ability to sustain relationships, work, or just get through the day. Many people find it difficult to access mainstream mental health services and do not have access to mechanisms of support to help them live their daily lives, leading to isolation and further stigmatisation. Evidence suggests that there is an unacceptably large 'premature mortality gap' resulting in huge health inequalities (HSCIC, 2009). People with serious mental illness die on average 15 to 20 years earlier than those without, often from avoidable causes (Mental Health Foundation, 2016).

The report Creative Health released this year (2017) by the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Arts, Health and Wellbeing, lays out a compelling case for our healthcare systems to better utilise the creative arts in supporting health and wellbeing outcomes, building on a growing body of evidence in mental health. There is a real need to support local communities to raise awareness of good physical and mental health and support people to seek help when they need it (Department of Health, 2016).

The Local Kent Context

There are an estimated 205,000 people living with common and severe mental illness in Kent communities (Kent County Council, 2015). Around 5,000 to 7,000 of these will need a clearly defined care programme of support to avoid relapse and promote recovery. The rest will need variable, lower intensity support to stop them reaching a crisis point and unnecessarily entering into health and social care systems.

The Canterbury Art Studio Project

The Canterbury Art Studio commenced its project in 2016 aiming to provide residents of Canterbury who are unable to access mainstream arts based mental health services, an opportunity to enrol in a six session art programme facilitated by an experienced art psychotherapist and 2 student volunteers, at the Beaney House of Art and Knowledge. The programme was evaluated by the England Centre for Practice Development in collaboration with a researcher from the Sidney De Haan Research Centre for Arts and Health (Jackson, Naicke and Wright, 2016).

At the end of the programme participants presented their art work to the public in a two-week art exhibition, held in 'The Front Room Gallery' of The Beaney titled '*Taking the line for a walk: discovering a creative identity*'. Feedback from the public was integrated into the evaluation report and partly presented here as a poem to show the impact that it had on raising awareness.



Inspirational - such poignancy in each story

Heart-warming, quickening

Beautiful inside and out

A triumph! Inspirational and moving

Really exciting, creative and brilliant scheme

Such wonderful art from unheard voices in our society. Thank you - I hope your valuable work will continue.

The Power of Art

Poem developed by Carolyn Jackson using public comments from 2016 exhibition

Following on from the success of this initiative, the Canterbury Art Studio were able to secure continued collaboration through Canterbury Christ Church University to support the first cohort of 6 participants to sustain their work, and to enable recruitment of a second cohort of another six participants in 2017 to run alongside the original cohort whose work continued.

Creative art space was provided by the team supporting the Community Arts and Education programme in the Faculty of Education at Canterbury Christ Church University. The continuation of the project enabled the group to consolidate its purpose. Meeting for six sessions, each person was offered the opportunity to 'discover their creative identity' and find purpose and direction as well as address self-esteem. Each session provided time for participants to reflect and feedback to each other, a positive critique that contributes to creative and personal growth. In this way group members have found a mirror, discovering how others see them and their creative work. The ongoing sessions have led to the development of supportive relationships and there have been some changes to include the work of members of two new groups founded on a similar basis and as a result of collaboration with Live Well Kent and the Shaw Trust. The culmination of the work was presented at a public art exhibition in the Front Room of the Beane House of Art and Knowledge in Canterbury for a second year running.



Image: Egyptian Bay by Scott Wanstall

Every Picture Tells a Story

A group exhibition challenging the stigma around mental health and individuals' views about art.

Saturday 8 July to Sunday 20 August 2017

The Front Room

The Beane House of Art & Knowledge, 18 High Street, Canterbury CT1 2RA

Free admission.
For full opening times
please go to thebeane.co.uk
[@beanefrontroom](https://twitter.com/beanefrontroom)



2. Evaluation Data Sets and Methods

The participants selected eight methods of capturing the impact of their experiences with their facilitators at the beginning, during and at the end of their programme which were then independently analysed, presented in Table 1 below. This provided an opportunity to analyse impact quantitatively and qualitatively from the perspective of facilitators, participants, museum staff, public visitors to the art exhibition and carers.

Table 1. Data Sets Presented for Analysis

No.	Data set	Data type	Data provided by
1	Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS)(Tennant et al 2007)	Quantitative	Participants
2	Brief reflections/ responses postcards post session	Qualitative	Participants
3	Reflections/ responses post initiative	Qualitative	Co-facilitators
4	Reflections/ responses post initiative	Qualitative	Museum staff
5	Exhibition comments book	Qualitative	Exhibition visitors
6	Exhibition feedback slips	Qualitative	Exhibition visitors
7	Exhibition leaf tag comments	Qualitative	Exhibition visitors
8	Email carer feedback	Qualitative	Carers

3. Results

The Canterbury Art Studio continued to collect experiential data from participants who had started in 2016 as well as the new cohort commencing in 2017. This information is presented in tables to illustrate WEMWBS scores below.

Cohort 1 (2016 group)

Participant Number	Session 1	Session 2	Session 3	Session 4	Session 5
1	57	56(-1)	DNA	56	67(+11)
2	59	57(-1)	61(+4)	59(-3)	58(-1)
3	56	55(-1)	56(+1)	56	56
4	56	57(+1)	46(-11)	41(-5)	37(-4)
5	42	47(+5)	48(+1)	44(+4)	41(-3)
6		32	DNA	DNA	DNA

In Cohort 1, one participant demonstrated strongly an impact of the programme on their mental health and wellbeing with a significant increase in wellbeing score (P1). One participant more or less remained constant (P3), 3 participants reported scores indicating a decline in their

mental health and wellbeing, two significantly so (P4 and P5), although the scores are not reflected in the qualitative comments made in the postcard evaluations for this cohort. Scoring within the evaluation as well as the presentation of participants were acknowledged and people were supported within the group context by the therapist. Additionally the therapist/group lead and facilitator conducted initial meetings with each group member prior to the start of the sessions. Here they were asked for a contact person if there were any concerns about their health and wellbeing and there was agreement that they would be informed that this was going to happen. There were occasions where this occurred and this was utilized to positively reinforce professional relationships and a sense of psychological holding and support.

Qualitative comments made by Cohort 1 participants in the second and last week of their programme through postcard evaluations indicate a positive impact on their wellbeing.

Cohort 1

Week 2

P1 When I first joined the group I had enormous difficulty finding my own inspiring start to this process and gradually through fun and loosening up with the group and Joyce's expertise I have learnt to develop my style. I have also managed to do some homework outside of the group and this gives me a focus for when I arrive. Am really enjoying the group and certainly getting my money's worth.

P2 Coming to the Art group has inspired me to try different styles, I enjoy socialising with other members of the group.

P3 I feel that the art and the therapists measure that we do is very invigorating and inspiring.

P4 Being in the group has really helped my confidence in experimenting with art. The atmosphere is always really comfortable and everyone is open and friendly.

P5 I find the group very helpful and I enjoy coming as a medium to fight against anxiety and depression. Not just coming here but finding a new and exciting 'hobby'; in which I can find talent inside me to find inspiration in the world.

Week 5

P1 Being in the group has been relaxing, contagious and fun, inspirational, refreshing, all about confidence building, something to aspire to. I love the human company, the helpful criticism, the enthusiasm from others and the laughs. I definitely enjoy coming to this group to express myself.

P2 I really enjoy socialising and creating my art.... I'm looking forward to doing the ink art.

P3 I find the group very invigorating and knowledgeable towards my artistic measure.

P4 Being in the group is a wonderful experience and I always look forward to it. I feel like it's a relaxed and understanding atmosphere and I feel comfortable coming no matter what my mood is. It helps me to take time for myself in the week.

P5 Despite being in a very dark and frightened time I find a relief to create things. If I can create I exist and love purpose. I hope in time I will look back into the paintings I have created with less pain as I attempt to create life through the medium of art.

Cohort 2 (2017 Group)

From the cohort of 6 participants, 1 participant demonstrated a strong impact of the programme on their mental health and wellbeing (P1) and one participant a slight impact (P5). 2 participants showed very little change (P2 and 3), and two participants did not complete the programme. One person was unable to commit due to the nature of her diagnosis. The second struggled with engaging because of her work commitments but also because of the nature of her diagnosis. The coordinator reported that group work with these two people with severe and enduring mental health difficulties *“is notoriously challenging and the commitment achieved in itself is noteworthy.”*

Participant Number	Session 1	Session 2	Session 3	Session 4	Session 5
1	58(+9)	61(+3)	60 (-1)	55 (-5)	70 (+15)
2	59(-1)	57(-2)	DNA	59 (+2)	58 (-1)
3	56	70(+14)	56 (-14)	56	56
4	45(+8)	48(+3)	DNA	DNA	DNA
5	37(+4)	50(+13)	DNA	49 (-1)	50 (+1)
6	DNA	31	37 (+6)	DNA	DNA

Qualitative comments made by participants in the second and last week of their programme through postcard evaluations indicate a positive impact on their wellbeing for participants 1 and 5 showing a qualitative association with their quantitative scores. Participants 2 and 3 reported feeling the benefits of the programme in terms of developing insight into their own skills and abilities. These comments did not directly associate with their quantitative scores, which remained unchanged or scored slightly less at the end than the start of the programme.

Cohort 2

Week 2

P1 I feel excited, energised, happy, thrilled to be involve with such lovely people and be painting with a lot more positivity and hope towards my work. I feel challenged and inspired and wanting to do more. Thank you for your contributions.

P2 Joining into the group has been really therapeutic. I can't wait until I show some of my work at The Beaney art gallery.

P3 This week's art group was so satisfying and relaxing. I felt like I was back at school.

P5 I enjoyed the art group immensely. Feel safe here and the other people are lovely and kind. I have learnt so much and I have broadened my horizons and I feel such joy painting. I never imagined being an artist after forty years of feeling inept.

Week 5

P1 This had been one eventful journey. I have loved participating and getting the fullest amount form my art work. Trying out new techniques and generally socialising with such a fun group of people and learning so much. It has been interesting, emotional, rewarding and satisfying. I am so in appreciation for this opportunity and feel much more qualified to go away and paint on my own or with others so that I can improve my skills. It has opened my mind and installed inspiration in me and made me want to paint.

P2 Taking part in the art group has helped me to gain good feedback about my pictures. I'm so glad that everyone else in the group really likes what I produce. Also, great socialisation.

P3 Since I have been attending this every week art study has made me realise that I have still got a flare for art like I used to. Therefore I have more prospect ahead of me and a skill in artistic flare and artistry.

P5 I have enjoyed spending time with like-minded people experiencing and creating art. I would be very sad never to meet again in September if there is no funding to continue. I think we have formed a friendly group I like and it make me happy to think that our group will be part of my life. I have learnt so much here, feeling very comfortable with the people I enjoy. I hope to start again in September.

Artist's statements

Each exhibiting participant was invited to write an optional statement that would be positioned alongside their art work to share with the public during the exhibition of their work. The statements transpire to be a useful reflection for both their own creative and therapeutic process as well as a summary of their experience of the sessions. Excerpts are provided here to demonstrate impact on their health and wellbeing.

Participant Artist 1

When I started the course this time, I went from a slightly nervous, apprehensive student to a very vocal, compassionate expressionist who thoroughly enjoyed the whole season! I love the freedom of expressing myself and although I may not be a realistic artist I feel that by

focusing and enjoying what I do I can happily complete a piece without too much criticism of myself. I like color a lot and this helps to elevate my positive mood. Overall, it has been a very productive experience and I would truly love to repeat the course and gain future benefits from participating.”

Participant Artist 2

“The designs I create are entirely ‘free hand’ and not pre-printed. Drawing them is a very peaceful pastime, and they give me a lot of satisfaction. It has been good to come along to the Art Group each week as it gives me a great chance to meet up and socialize with other people, and to learn about different art forms. The feedback part of the group is excellent, and I really appreciate the positive comments received about my work.”

Participant Artist 3

“Due to an extensive passage of my artistic measure I believe that what I have created has been a very fulfilling formula, has been put together for fun and love of my heart, and has been very encouraging for the life as an artist.”

Participant Artist 4

“My artwork takes a view of issues and subjects that are meaningful to me. Often referencing my personal life, my work explores the varying relationships between the things that make me who I am. I love making artwork as it allows me to express how I am feeling, what is important to me and show it to the outside world. At one of my exhibitions a lady cried upon seeing one of my eating disorder pieces and that has moved me to keep creating. Being in the group has been a very calming experience for me.”

Participant Artist 5

“This group has changed my entire idea of art. I felt, as many feel, that art is for other people - I cannot draw nor do I have any imagination. Freeing me from this prison of elitist fantasy, I started to enjoy creating art for the only purpose of enjoying the process without demeaning myself for my lack of talent. Basically, I have changed so much, realizing that everything I originally thought about art was wrong. Art is for everyone - not just a talented elite. We express ourselves with every mark we make in life.”

Co Facilitators’ Evaluation

Co-facilitators of the group sessions gave feedback about the initiative continuing to be a rewarding experience, and that they felt they identified with being a member of the group too. This experience led them to be more experimental with their own art and allowed for greater freedom and growth in their own creative processes. They felt frustrated and uncertain about the future in terms of whether funding could be sought to continue the initiative. There had been some success with support from the Shaw Trust which created a sense of hope that there may be some possibility of working with the County Council in the future to continue to support the existing cohorts and recruit new ones. These excerpts from their reflections summarise the impact they perceived from the initiative:

“Sessions provided a nurturing and non-judgmental space, enabling each participant to explore their own creativity and improve self-esteem. By doing so, each person could move away from the labels given by the medical profession and concentrate on being an individual. The motivation then began to shift from illness to wellness and a huge focus on being an artist and the importance and value this has on one’s life. This creation of ‘safe space’ allowed each person to share details of their lives that they felt unable to share in other circumstances, and find common ground.” (Co-facilitator Gp1)

“From my perspective as peer co-facilitator, it has been a privilege to witness the individual growth of the participants. I have learnt much this year about Art Therapy practice. I am always excited to be a part of something as special and well-led as this project. I am passionate about bringing social justice and inclusion to our society and wish that more projects such as this were ongoing. It is a vital importance that within our communities we have positive mental health support and I strongly believe that this programme provides this.” (Co-facilitator Gp 2)

Public evaluation

The public were invited to evaluate the exhibition by writing in a comments book, completing a comments slip posted anonymously in a comments box by the main door of the gallery or by completing a leaf shaped tag which could be hung on a memory tree in the gallery. There were 121 comments made by the public about the exhibition. These comments were grouped and themed accordingly with the main observations being that the work was **inspirational, moving, and beautiful**

“A truly moving and beautiful exhibition. I’m so inspired” (P121) “Thank you for putting a little beauty into the world” (P7) “Beautiful exhibition - very true: art is for everyone and it is a wonderful way to express feelings” (P1)

There was a desire to see the work continue through comments like *“keep up the good work” (p24)* and *“Keep working and don’t lose faith in yourselves” (P36).*

The gallery space also helped to engender a **feeling of wellbeing** in the public. *“This place made me very happy and emotional” (P32). “Life here is wonderful. I don’t want to leave”.(P32) “Art like this makes life beautiful” (P5) “It makes me feel good that so many of you have benefitted from painting”(67) “I love it. It makes me feel warm” (p74).*

Only 2 members of the public recorded that they did not like the exhibition, but no qualifying statements were provided to substantiate their one word comments which were “bad” and “bad art”.

Carer Evaluation

Carers were invited to submit a written evaluation into the impact of the initiative on their family members by letter or email to the Canterbury Art Studio lead. Two of the exhibiting artist’s carers and families talked about the impact it had had on the individual and the wider family in terms of creating a sense of support, self-worth and self-confidence and focus for the individual artist. These two artists families also talked about the importance of the scheme and their hope that it would be recognised by the County Council as an important area to invest in in terms of mental health and wellbeing services for the community.

"It is always a worry to us that X hasn't enough engagement outside of the family, so the Art course ticked the boxes on many levels. Being naturally creative, it was something that X was very willing to participate in especially as it also meant being able to communicate with other like-minded people especially as she knew some of the other group members. So it was a great social outlet for her too" (Cohort 2 Family of P 1).

"I know the course really has given her a tremendous boost in terms of her self-confidence and self-worth, and I know X would really love the course to continue so that she can develop further as an artist, especially as we know that you and your colleagues do such a brilliant job for all the participants". (Family of P 1).

"My son will never be 100% but has been helped in the last couple of years by being on an Art Course. Art was something he was fairly good at... when at school. So with the help and guidance by the facilitators he has developed his own style. We are very taken with his work and I have to say...as parents it is a long time since I have been able to say that sort of thing.....because he has spent so much time in hospital. The Beaney Museum/Art Gallery is also impressed because they have used his work and that of others to run an art exhibition" (Cohort 1 Family of P2).

"Imagine their joy when people have come up to them and said... "I really love your picture" and "I would like to buy it ". I can tell you that these words are one of the best therapies that they will ever hear. It makes them feel valued and boosts their self-esteem." (Cohort 1 Family of P2).

Museum Staff Evaluation

The museum staff highlighted the importance of the front room gallery space providing an opportunity for artists and the public to connect with issues that affect communities and to raise awareness of the impact of these issues on peoples' lives. The Beaney museum is committed to working collaboratively with a range of funders, researchers and voluntary groups to explore ways in which the space can be used productively to impact positively on the lives of local residents and identified the important role that museums play in achieving this. They highlighted how difficult it is to harness funding to underpin impact evaluation and their aspiration to see more joined up systematic evidence bases being created to influence social prescribing.

4. Discussion

This was the second year of the initiative offering the unique collaboration between the Beaney Museum, Canterbury Art Studio, Community Arts and Education and the England Centre for Practice Development at Canterbury Christ Church University.

The Community Art Studio Group initiative differs from other community art groups because it uses a specific approach, coupled with the staging of the public selling exhibition.

The focus is not necessarily upon skill at technique but upon the nature of art and the opportunity for self-expression. This offers participants something beyond the individual sessions themselves and beyond the project. Additionally, beyond the philosophy of art therapy where the focus is upon the art process and not necessarily a finished image or product, the non-compulsory opportunity to exhibit offers a professional role. It also offers the

opportunity to increase self-esteem, achieve the kudos of being publicly shown and to challenge the stigma of mental illness by exhibiting as a group consisting of people with a formal diagnosis of mental ill health, or not. Achieving a sale also appears to contribute to a positive sense of self-worth. This aspect continues to show inventiveness and courage in raising awareness of mental health experiences from practitioner and service user perspectives.

Whilst the numbers of participants remains small there are undoubted self-reported qualitative benefits for some participants in terms of their self-confidence and self-awareness in relation to their mental health and wellbeing. This year the project used a different mental health and wellbeing scoring tool, but as the numbers were so small it is not possible to draw conclusions regarding which provides the most insight.

At a national level, the publication of Creative Health (2017) by the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Arts, Health and Wellbeing may pave the way for a new era of funding for arts and health initiatives such as this. This is so important at a time when mainstream mental health services in the UK are at their most severely underfunded in their history, with national staff shortages, and a crisis in funding in-patient and community beds. At the same time mixed anxiety & depression is the most common mental disorder in Britain, with 7.8% of people meeting criteria for diagnosis (NICE 2011).

This project and many like it have the potential to reduce the stigma attached to mental illness and the social isolation that many people in our communities experience as a result. The relationship between mental health and social inclusion and developing meaningful relationships in society are important interrelated concepts that should not be underestimated.

5. Conclusions

Participants felt that they benefited from ongoing sessions and evidenced this qualitatively in their postcard evaluations and artist statements.

The therapist's experience was of a group dynamic being consolidated, relationships established and the philosophical aim of creating an artistic identity was achieved, witnessed particularly at the 'meet the artists' opening event of the exhibition.

The exhibition and its positive impact is an important, integral part of the process. This was noted qualitatively in terms of comments made by the participants exhibiting and this might be recorded more formally. There would be further grounds for quantitative research in this area.

There were issues around not having enough people participating. As a result there are no further groups planned with Canterbury Christ Church University who cannot sustain support in terms of the cost in providing the studio and the administrative support attached. Eliciting pertinent referrals within this context and milieu was challenged by the philosophy of the service and the very nature of what the group lead and therapist was setting out to achieve.

At the time of writing this report Live Well Kent has commissioned a further pilot making direct referrals from their service. The report writers feel that this is a missed opportunity for the University going forwards.

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